

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Interrogating the ethics of operational psychology

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Abstract

Commissioned amidst allegations of collusion between American Psychological Association officials and Central Intelligence Agency and Department of Defense officials involved in the enhanced interrogation programme, the July 2015 Hoffman Report documented a decade of collusion between American Psychological Association and Department of Defense officials in unethical national security interrogations. However, interrogation support is but one of numerous areas where psychologists are directly aiding military and intelligence operations, an area known as operational psychology. The ethical issues posed by the larger field of operational psychology have received little public discussion apart from apologia by operational psychologists themselves. To stimulate public review of operational psychology, leaders of the movement to remove psychologists from national security interrogations convened, in September 2015, a group of experts to work towards a consensus set of principles to guide future discussion. Participants included psychologists, physicians, and social scientists; military and intelligence professionals; and attorneys, ethicists, and human rights advocates. The discussion also drew upon years of dialogue between participants and military health and intelligence professionals. The workshop produced "The Brookline Principles on the Ethical Practice of Operational Psychology," with implications for the profession of psychology and for civil society.

KEYWORDS

APA, Hoffman Report, interrogations, PENS Report, torture

1 | BACKGROUND

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, there were increased demands for psychologists to aid U.S. military and intelligence operations, roles that have come to be known as "operational psychology" as they contrasted from traditional health provider and personnel selection roles for military psychologists. Among these roles was participation in national security interrogations conducted by the military and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), interrogations that sometimes constituted torture.

American Psychological Association (APA) support of Department of Defense (DoD) and, possibly, CIA interrogations has been the source of intense controversy and activist struggle for well over a decade (Arrigo, 2007; Benjamin, 2006a, 2006b; Olson & Soldz, 2007; Olson, Soldz, & Davis, 2008; Pope & Gutheil, 2008, 2009; Psychologists for Social Responsibility, 2009; Soldz, 2009; Soldz & Olson, 2008; Soldz & Reisner, 2009). In 2005, the APA created the Psychological Ethics and National Security (PENS) Task Force, which was dominated by military officers and DoD employees and consultants (Benjamin, 2006b). This task force endorsed psychologist involvement in national security interrogations. A decade of conflict over the PENS recommendations ensued.

The recent release of the executive summary of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (2014) report on CIA torture has refocused public attention on the role of psychologists in the U.S. government's administration of torture. Psychologists designed, often implemented, monitored, and researched the CIA's so-called enhanced interrogation torture programme while assessing prisoners' suitability for torture (Eban, 2007; Keller et al., 2014; Mayer, 2007, 2008; Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2014). The Senate report and commentaries on it have also renewed interest in the critical role that psychologists and other health providers played in providing legal and ethical protection for the torture programme. Simultaneously, James Risen's (2014) book, *Pay Any Price*, revealed high-level contacts between APA officials and the CIA and White House, raising concerns that APA had provided ethical cover for psychologists in interrogations during a period of state-sanctioned torture. Additional analysis of Risen's emails between APA, CIA, White House, and DoD officials (Soldz et al., 2015), released by the *New York Times* in April 2015, amplified these concerns.

Following Risen's exposé in the *New York Times*, the struggle quickly came to a head with APA appointment of a special investigator, David Hoffman, to inquire into alleged collusion between APA leaders and government officials involved in the torture programme. The *Hoffman Report* (Hoffman et al., 2015), completed in July 2015, documented a years-long pattern of collusion between APA and DoD officials.¹

Following the *Hoffman Report*, in August 2015, the APA passed a historic ban on psychologist participation in national security interrogations and on psychologist involvement in detainee affairs at detention centres determined by United Nations officials to be operating in violation of international law (APA, 2015). This ban, and the *Hoffman Report* itself, has been subject to withering attacks from military psychologists with a history of involvement in interrogations and their allies (Bolgiano & Taylor, 2015; see the materials on PsychCoalition, <http://psychcoalition.org/index.html>). Simultaneously, DoD officials have pressured the APA to change its policies (Carson, 2016; Eidelson et al., 2016). As of this writing, the ban still stands.

The ethics of two closely related aspects of psychologists' roles in national security interrogations should be considered separately. First, there is the question of psychologist participation in interrogations that specifically involve torture or other similar abuse such as cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment (CIDT). Everyone, including APA leadership, agreed that psychologists should not be involved in torture or CIDT. However, as with commentators from other fields, within psychology, there is considerable controversy as to what constitutes torture or CIDT. Critics of APA policies have contended that APA leaders, similar to many intelligence officials, have focused on detailed legalistic definitions of torture and CIDT, distracting attention from psychologist involvement in situations that are inherently abusive—such as the indefinite detention at Guantánamo—while turning a blind eye to many abuses being committed and sanctioned by institutions of the U.S. government.

Second, there is the question of psychologist involvement in interrogations in any direct capacity, regardless of whether those interrogations are abusive. Medicine and psychiatry have clearly stipulated that any direct involvement of their members in interrogations violates their fundamental professional stance that the physician and psychiatrist are healers. Part of the APA scandal is that the association's leadership framed the discussion by presuming, from the outset, that involvement of psychologists in interrogations was ethical. The ban enacted in the summer of 2015 decisively rejects this presumption, although the ethical basis for the ban has not yet been clearly articulated. Therefore, the applicability of the reasoning behind the ban to other aspects of psychologist activity is at present murky.

2 | OPERATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Attention to psychologist involvement in national security interrogations has neglected related issues regarding psychologist participation in a broader spectrum of military and intelligence operations known as “operational psychology.” Simply put, operational psychology is the use by professional psychologists of psychological knowledge and expertise to further the operations of national security organizations and institutions. In addition to interrogation support, examples of operational psychology include psychological warfare (psychological operations), personnel screening for high-risk or high-stakes intelligence missions, hostage negotiation, identification of potential terrorists for detention or for execution via drone attack, and operations research by psychologists. When furthering hostile military and intelligence objectives, operational psychology stands in stark contrast to the traditional, and more familiar, clinical roles of psychologists in the military.

Disturbingly, the broader issues involving operational psychology have received virtually no attention within the larger profession. The exception is *Ethical Practice in Operational Psychology* (Kennedy & Williams, 2011), published by APA books, all of whose authors are operational psychologists, including four known overt and covert participants in the PENS Task Force. The editors and authors extrapolate their ethics from the *PENS Report*. Hoffman and others have identified production of the *PENS Report* at the centre of the APA–DoD collusion. In addition, in 2013, the APA leadership, through a purported consensus process that bypassed critics, led the Council of Representatives into perfunctory approval of *operational psychology*—explicitly naming consultation to antiterrorism, counterterrorism, and counterintelligence operations—as part of the larger APA specialty area of police and public safety psychology. To this day, officials have not responded to complaints about this evasion of APA democratic process.

Critics, including the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology (2012), have argued that psychologist involvement in potentially abusive interrogations violates several of the profession's central ethical principles. These include autonomy, which requires informed consent, nonmaleficence or “do no harm,” and the ethical oversight of the psychologist's work by independent bodies. Many other forms of operational psychology similarly violate standards of psychological ethics.

According to critics, there are limits to traditional ethical approaches, premised as they are on assumptions of ethical autonomy of psychologists, assumptions that are problematic in military, and intelligence settings. Given the hierarchical nature of the military and the requirement to obey orders, assertions of ethical responsibilities at odds with orders are made at considerable risk to the individual making the claim. However, service members are not supposed to violate their professional ethics. Although not all operational psychologists are APA members, subject to the APA's ethics code, most, including the behavioural science consultants, are required to hold state licences, and most states adopt the APA code as ethical requirements for their licensed psychologists. The clearer their professional obligations are, the greater the ability military psychologists will have to assert them. Even in the CIA, risk to one's professional licence is sometimes an acceptable reason to refuse an assignment.

In a 2012 paper, coalition members Jean Maria Arrigo and Roy Eidelson, together with retired senior army interrogator Ray Bennett (Arrigo, Eidelson, & Bennett, 2012), and in consultation with numerous other military and intelligence professionals, sought to demarcate ethically acceptable forms of operational psychology from ethically unacceptable forms. Arrigo et al. distinguish between what they called *adversarial operational psychology* (AOP) and *collaborative operational psychology* (COP). In brief, AOP is any form of operational psychology that causes more than trivial unstipulated harm² to the target of the intervention or does not ensure a reasonable level of informed consent or would not normally be subject to external ethical monitoring through independent professional institutions. COP refers to the traditional tasks of human resources training and management and organizational consultation for military and intelligence operations.

The 9/11 attacks on the United States have motivated psychologists to advance counterterrorism and related operations through psychological principles and skills. These operational psychologists seek to legitimize adversarial interventions against targets by prioritizing societal welfare over traditional, individual-focused principles of psychological ethics. In their essay, Arrigo et al. (2012) distinguish AOP, which facilitates deceptive and coercive operations,

from COP, which optimizes personnel performance in high-risk operations. Their analysis finds that AOP is largely unsupported by the APA Ethics Code, that its potential benefits are exceeded by the likelihood of irreversible harms, and that its military necessity is undemonstrated. Arrigo et al. offer a three-factor framework for distinguishing between AOP and COP and recommend institutional separation of these roles so that professional psychologists do not serve in adversarial capacities.

Arrigo et al. (2012) evoked rebuttals from adversarial operational psychologists (Arrigo, Eidelson, & Rockwood, 2015; Staal & Greene, 2015). However, in our opinion, these critiques failed to seriously engage the issues raised, presenting, rather, a rosy picture of operational psychology. Most notably, Arrigo et al. (2015) argued that the rebuttals ignored opinions of many military intelligence professionals who challenged the utility and military necessity of AOP.

3 | WORKSHOP

3.1 | Ethics of Operational Psychology Workshop

In order to articulate and advance discussion of the ethical issues involved in operational psychology, the current authors convened a group of experts to potentially develop a consensus set of principles to guide future discussion. In selecting workshop participants, we consciously did not seek to represent all perspectives, as we found it unlikely to lead to a productive discussion at that stage of conceptual development. Given years of work on the interrogations issue, we believed it was essential to understand the situational and institutional constraints posed by the military and intelligence organizations.

We therefore sought participants from relevant disciplines who had shown significant concerns and expertise regarding the ethics of psychologist involvement in national security interrogations. The expectation was that this particular set of individuals would be well prepared to engage the difficult ethical issues posed by this new area of psychological practice. We realized, of course, that future efforts would involve engagement from stakeholders who represent a wider range of opinions. The Ethics of Operational Psychology Workshop convened on the weekend of September 18–20, 2015, at the Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis in Brookline, Massachusetts, with financial support from the Meyer Foundation.³ Participants included psychologists, physicians, and social scientists; military and intelligence professionals; and attorneys, ethicists, and human rights advocates. The discussion also drew upon years of dialogue between participants and members of the military and intelligence communities, including military health professionals, lawyers, interrogators, counterintelligence professionals, and special forces, among others.

Divided into small groups, workshop participants examined cases illustrating operational psychology in real-world settings as well as key ethical concepts (e.g., harm) and special issues (e.g., ethical monitoring), all identified by the organizers. At intervals throughout the workshop, all participants came together to integrate the varied materials. At the end of the workshop, a statement of general principles was developed—*The Brookline Principles on the Ethical Practice of Operational Psychology*. This statement was publicly released (see Appendix) at the end of September 2015 (Ethics of Operational Psychology Workshop, 2015). Almost immediately after distribution, the Brookline Principles were attacked by senior operational psychologists and others.

3.2 | Issues raised in workshop

3.2.1 | Telos

Some workshop participants held that any position on operational psychology needed to be anchored, implicitly or explicitly, in agreement upon the proper end goals of the profession, or its telos. Although the workshop did not overtly discuss the telos of psychology in depth, there was agreement that the profession should retain its traditional focus on furthering the psychological health and welfare of human beings as individuals and as communities. Given this agreement, actions by psychologists can be judged by the degree to which their work furthered psychological health and well-being. It should be noted that this telos is universal: The health and welfare of individuals and

communities within one society are not assigned greater value than those in other societies. The universal telos of psychology thus directly conflicts with the military telos, which prioritizes the victory of one nation, the United States, and its allies over that of other nations (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013).

Resolution of the dual-loyalty problem in psychological ethics requires determination of the operational psychologist's primary loyalty, whether to the profession of psychology or to the profession of arms. Workshop participants believed that, if individuals identify as psychologists, their primary loyalty must be to that profession; otherwise, psychology would lose its unique social role. Further, workshop participants, especially those from national security settings, advised that, where possible, dual-loyalty conflicts are best prevented rather than managed.

3.2.2 | Harm and identification of vulnerabilities

Psychology has committed itself to a "do no harm" foundation for its ethics. The APA's (2002) Ethics Code states in its Principle A: "Psychologists strive to benefit those with whom they work and take care to do no harm." Advocates of AOP have challenged this concept by interpreting the government as the client of the psychologist (Arrigo et al., 2012; Kennedy & Williams, 2011; Olson et al., 2008). That is, the psychologist is seen as protecting the government—and, by extension, the civilian populace—against enemies of the state. As a matter of practical ethics, the principle of "do as little harm as possible" has been proffered as an alternative for "do no harm" (Kennedy & Williams, 2011). Conflating civilian and national security settings, the do-as-little-harm-as-possible theorists argue that psychologists rely on the same principle of minimizing harm when conducting child custody evaluations that may cause (real or perceived) harm to a parent denied custody (Koocher, 2007).

Although these commentators are correct that harm cannot always be avoided, workshop participants believed strongly that the "do no harm" ethic is central to psychology's identity and to its social role as a profession—that of using professional knowledge of human functioning to improve people's psychological functioning and welfare. Most workshop participants argued that AOP is qualitatively unlike most other examples of psychological activities where a degree of harm may result. In the child custody example above, no attempt is made by the evaluating psychologist to use his or her knowledge and expertise to harm or psychologically weaken a parent denied custody, the denied parent may have psychological and legal representation, and psychological evaluations are open to subpoena. In forensic work, harm is incidental; it is neither sought nor an essential characteristic of the psychological activity.

In AOP, however, the goal of psychologist intervention often is, in fact, to cause harm to others, to targets of manipulation or to the enemy. As former APA President Gerald Koocher told the PENS Task Force electronic mailing list: "The goal of such psychologists' work will ultimately be the protection of others (i.e., innocents) by contributing to the incarceration, debilitation, or even death of the potential perpetrator, who will often remain unaware of the psychologists' involvement" (Psychological Ethics and National Security Task Force, 2009, p. 13, May 6, 2005).

In other instances, although the explicit goal may not be to cause harm, the infliction of harm is intrinsic to the activity. In national security interrogations, for example, the goal of psychologist intervention is to use psychological expertise to undermine the prisoner's will to resist through manipulation of vulnerabilities. In many instances, this intervention does involve the deliberate infliction of harm, such as increasing detainee fear and anxiety, for themselves or perhaps loved ones. Even genuine cases of rapport-based interrogation typically aim for the prisoner's betrayal of comrades or ideals, potentially resulting in severe shame, guilt, depression, and possible retaliation by others on their side of the conflict. And these are the relatively benign cases, where the prisoner actually holds the knowledge sought by the interrogator and is thus provided an escape route from the interrogation.

Also, in interrogations and other AOP activities, the person subject to psychological intervention is merely an object to be used, for example, for information in the interrogation case. Most workshop participants believed that such use of others as objects is always a violation of psychology's fundamental commitment to individual and group psychological health and well-being. However, this position points to the use of soldiers themselves as expendable objects—one of several quandaries the organizers of the workshop removed from consideration at the outset as beyond the scope of this workshop.

One workshop participant felt that, in certain national security activities, it was ethical for a psychologist to aid investigation of a possible national security breach, even when the investigation involved severely deceptive and intrusive practices. This dissent highlighted the need for further clarification of boundary criteria for ethical actions in this domain. Others accepted the need for such investigations but objected to the involvement of psychologists, and some participants objected to such government actions altogether.

3.2.3 | Safety officer role

Advocates for operational psychology extol the role of psychologist as a safety officer. The safety officer is responsible for determining when harsh or even brutal interventions, such as the Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) training on U.S. soldiers (McCoy, 2012; Otterman, 2007), has or is close to going too far. Although some workshop participants question the ethics of the SERE safety officer role, the targeted soldier of the psychological intervention has at least consented to the training and thus implicitly to the psychological monitoring. Also, the SERE psychologist has no role other than protection of the trainee from harm.

In contrast, when an adversarial operational psychologist is a safety officer, the target of the intervention often has not consented to experience harm (although, as was briefly discussed at the workshop, some thinkers take the position that a terrorist or spy has implicitly consented to interrogation if captured).⁴ The AOP safety officer faces a more severe array of conflicts than existed in the SERE setting. There is, for instance, a commitment to obtain information, often within a context that holds the disputed premise that harsh treatment is conducive to actionable intelligence. In such cases, the goal of avoiding serious harm, even when agreed to by the interrogation staff, potentially conflicts with and compromises the organizational commitment to obtain information. This conflict becomes even more serious when the safety officer is simultaneously a consultant on techniques for information extraction. Many further believe the role of psychologists and physicians as safety officers, in enhanced interrogations, was not to ensure safety at all. Instead health professionals were put in these roles to rationalize torturous acts such as sleep deprivation or waterboarding so they would be perceived to fall short of the Bush administration's weakened definitions of torture (Cole, 2009; Soldz et al., 2015).

In any case, workshop participants reached a general consensus that calibration of harm, at least without a reasonable degree of informed consent from the target (as in SERE training), was an inappropriate role for psychologists. The role of safety officer in hostile interrogations inevitably renders the psychologist in a position as accomplice to the imposition of harm without consent and thus conflicts with the profession's "do no harm" ethic.

3.2.4 | Justness of war and invariance principle

The workshop organizers inquired as to whether the just war theory had any application to the ethical issues under discussion. This inquiry was especially relevant because a primary locus of detention and interrogation abuse occurred in Iraq after the U.S. invasion, a war considered by many to be illegal and unjust. Under the just war theory (Walzer, 2015), state authorities are ethically responsible for authorizing only just wars, and soldiers are only ethically responsible for their conduct in pursuit of victory once war has been authorized. The just war theory is at odds with traditional psychological ethics, which holds individual psychologists ethically responsible for their actions.

A workshop subgroup discussed these matters and came to the conclusion that distinctions based on the just war theory were impractical, as there is no generally accepted adjudicating body or mechanism to decide which wars are just or unjust. The conclusion that did arise was called the *invariance principle*, meaning that psychological ethics remained invariant, or unchanged, whatever the broader social context.

One corollary of the invariance principle therefore is that whether operational psychologist activities were deemed ethical should be invariant with respect to the justice of the war. Therefore, actions deemed ethical for U.S. operational psychologists must also be deemed ethical for operational psychologists working for the putative enemy.

A second corollary is that the defence of the ethicality of an operational psychology task could not be premised upon its role in protecting the national security of the United States, for the actions could as well be conducted by

psychologists working for a foreign power. The ethicality of actions had to be judged independently of, for instance, their effectiveness and/or their contribution or harm to the protection and security of U.S. citizens.

Judgments as to whether specific actions actually further the national security of the United States are complex and subject to great dispute. Many in the military and intelligence community feel that one of the greatest threats to the security of the United States was the torture and other abuse committed by U.S. forces at Guantánamo, in Iraq, and elsewhere, as this torture served as a major recruitment tool for U.S. opponents (Goodman & Alexander, 2011). Thus, the invariance principle puts up a firewall against decisions of the justness of a conflict or whether the act is conducted by an ally or the opposition. The invariance principle may have further implications in this discussion. Standards such as avoiding harm should hold whether a psychologist is being paid by an organization or the vulnerable individual target of the intervention. The principle would also suggest the centrality of avoiding harm as an ethical standard for psychologists is invariant to the fears and pressures of 9/11, a primary rationale at the core of the PENS task force and APA collusion.

3.2.5 | Monitoring, accountability, and consultation

Participants thought that effective monitoring and accountability were vital components of the ethical practice of operational psychology, as they are in all areas of professional psychological practice. Several workshop participants had attempted to bring accountability to adversarial operational psychologists engaged in ethically questionable activities in the War on Terror. A number of ethics complaints were filed with psychology licensing boards in several states and with the APA Ethics Office. In no case did the complaint result in a comprehensive investigation, much less a sanction against the professional (Bond, 2008; Crane, 2010; Eidelson, 2015).

These failed attempts at accountability raised issues regarding how to best investigate and otherwise provide accountability for psychologists engaged in operational psychology, given the secret, highly classified, nature of the activities. In classified settings, information on psychologist activities is usually not accessible by state licensing boards or the APA Ethics Committee. However, some participants argued that, given they were obligated to make reasonable efforts, the state boards and APA Committee had failed even to attempt to obtain such information.

Security sector participants in the workshop insisted that some arrangement had to be made for psychologists to participate in at least some classified activities, given the necessity of secrecy in military operations. There was discussion of various possible arrangements that might allow for ethical monitoring and accountability even over classified activities. Among the possibilities raised was having some members of ethics committees or licensing boards obtain security clearances.

Another alternative discussed was the possibility of incorporating some type of internal ethical monitoring by psychologists in defence and intelligence agencies, perhaps modelled on an inspector general framework. Participants were split as to whether such efforts merited further investigation, with some feeling that these internal efforts are all that is possible and others feeling that internal monitoring provides no protection against abuses authorized by the chain of command and may even contribute to cover-ups.

There was agreement that effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms were vital if operational psychology was to function within professional ethical boundaries. Not discussed at the workshop, but relevant to this discussion, are concerns about the common failures of internal police monitoring to sanction offending officers or stem abuses in U.S. criminal justice settings.

The workshop also addressed the need for organizational mechanisms whereby operational psychologists could obtain unbiased ethical consultation, outside their chain of command. Such consultation, some believed, should cover not only the correct ethical decisions in a complex situation but would help the psychologist think through the ethical aspects of the issue in question. Such consultation mechanisms would need a large degree of public accountability to resist becoming captive to the exigencies of the security sector.

Where individuals are engaged in military or intelligence work that violates psychological ethics, workshop participants felt it was critical to the profession of psychology that these individuals no longer call themselves psychologists

or be considered by the external world as psychologists. They should be required to surrender any licence to practise psychology and should not serve in a clinical psychology Military Occupational Specialty. These individuals, it was believed, should play no role in professional psychological organizations such as the APA. Individuals choosing this route become intelligence professionals with expertise in psychology, not professional psychologists.

4 | DISCUSSION

4.1 | Role of a community psychology approach

Our approach to the APA torture issue emphasized an ethical, action-oriented, and interdisciplinary (e.g., psychology, law, medicine, institutional ethnography, ethics, and investigative journalism) approach. Whereas several of the primary activists came from a psychoanalytic approach, others came from community and social psychology, and our efforts were always infused with a community psychology perspective. Our emphasis on research, values, and action is consistent with thinking within community psychology (Rappaport, 1977), an approach that focuses on using psychological and other diverse forms of knowledge towards understanding and aiding communities, systems, and society.

Community psychology generally focuses upon community strengths and assets and emphasizes well-being rather than deficits and psychological disorders. It embraces critical civil- and human-rights-related reflections and ethical actions and encourages speaking truth to unjust power and privilege.

Community psychology encourages examining problems at multiple levels of analysis. Our work on operational psychology encompassed these diverse levels, with a strong emphasis on structural, institutional, and organizational factors affecting individual psychologist involvement with the security sector. Although intrapsychic and interpersonal variables are important, so are the more macro patterns, regularities, policies, and rules of a setting or organization, such as the APA, DoD, or CIA. Many of the difficult issues concerning the ethics of operational psychology involve tensions between these different levels, such as the rights of the individual versus the rights of society (Rappaport, 1977). Additionally, a community psychological outlook helps understand the limitations of an ethical approach focused solely upon the ethical responsibilities of individuals when those individuals are embedded in powerful complex social systems, such as the military or intelligence agencies.

Further, AOP arguments have suggested psychological protections of individuals can be downplayed when the psychologist's client is not that individual but an organization. A community psychology conscious of the tensions between systems at different analytic levels has many advantages over a purely individualistic approach in clarifying these issues.

Community psychology's emphasis on processes of empowerment emphasizes the importance of equal, collaborative relationships between psychologists and those from other communities, cultures, and worldviews (Rappaport, 1981). Given the sequestered situation of places like Guantánamo or the CIA's secret "black site" prisons, our group of activist psychologists had to focus more on advocating for those who have been tortured rather than with them. However, in other ways, we incorporated this community psychological perspective in efforts, including the workshop, involving work with many different communities, including antitorture military and intelligence individuals who have become allies, collaborators, and indeed friends. Few of us would have imagined as we began our efforts that interacting with military and intelligence professional would prove so valuable and enriching for us, believing as many of us did, that our values were antithetical. Although many psychologist activists retain critical perspectives regarding many military and intelligence activities, we have found strong commonalities that contribute to improved collaboration that will enhance the ethical thinking and practice of psychology.

4.2 | Implications for psychology

The last decade of military-APA collusion calls attention to the danger that intelligence professionals with psychological expertise may use their intelligence tradecraft to manipulate supposedly independent civil society organizations

such as the APA (Arrigo et al., 2012). These activities pose serious threats to the independence of the professional organizations and may violate understandings or perhaps even laws regarding civil–military relations. Clear boundaries between professional psychology and intelligence roles will reduce this threat.

This discussion of the ethics of operational psychology implicitly points to a need for further ethical evaluation in other areas of applied psychology in the civil sector, such as for instance marketing, and in the profession as a whole. To what extent and in what circumstances should professional psychology include activities that are intended to cause harm to some individuals or are indifferent to collateral damage? Is nonmaleficence really a foundational principle for the field, or should harm-causing activities be allowed in furtherance of the greatest good for the greatest number, or for corporate profit? Also, to what extent is respect for individual autonomy, with its privileging of informed consent in most circumstances, central to professional psychology? Or is autonomy, like nonmaleficence, simply a relic of another era, a dispensable anachronism?

To us, it seems clear that adversarial aspects of operational psychology pose truly foundational questions for professional psychology. Unless the profession vigorously grapples with these questions, they will be decided through either acquiescence or the whim of individual psychologists. Deep exploration of these issues may ultimately lead to a split in the psychology profession between those who hold nonmaleficence and respect for autonomy as central and those who do not.

Although our analysis only applies to psychology in the United States, aspects of it may be relevant to other countries. There is wide variation between countries regarding the extent to which psychologists are utilized for military or intelligence operations. Also, institutional arrangements for both professional psychology and military and intelligence operations vary considerably between countries. Thus, the current analysis raises questions that will need to be explored within each national framework.

4.3 | Implications for civil society

The ethics of operational psychology controversy is of vital importance because it poses critical issues affecting the larger society. Operational psychology practitioners function on the border between the military or intelligence world and the broader civil society. Even more complicated is the place of operational psychology contractors who function on the border between the military or intelligence world and mercenaries. The unrestricted expansion of operational psychology has the potential to further erode the field of psychological practice and research, including the epistemic scientific principles of open access and peer review, the autonomy of civil society, and the protection of its citizens.

The subterfuge behind the PENS Task Force perhaps best illustrates the dangers. As the *Hoffman Report* documents, the task force proceeded to synchronize APA's supposedly independent ethics policies regarding national security interrogations with DoD positions. The result was to transform those ethics policies into a propaganda tool for DoD practices. In fact, evidence indicates that the Secretary of Defense's office was closely monitoring the PENS process. Thus, the military members of the task force insisted that only one copy of the *Hoffman Report* be sent to the DoD, to the Secretary of Defense's office, and that it would be instantly disseminated to the military from there (Hoffman et al., 2015). The *PENS Report* derived from the instructions for the behavioural science consultants at Guantánamo and elsewhere that were written by PENS participant Morgan Banks (2005a, 2005b) and then used by him and another PENS member in consultation with the Army Surgeon General to revise those instructions. These new instructions then contained the *PENS Report* as an appendix.

As a result of this subterfuge and collusion, the APA, a purportedly independent professional organization with its own ethics code, failed to serve as a check on the potentially unethical activities of psychologists by the state, as military officers, CIA staff, and contractors. Further, the culture of the APA was transformed. Psychologists such as those in the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology who were sceptical of operational psychology activities were seen as disloyal to the nation and to the profession itself. As professional associations are corrupted in this way, democracy itself is threatened, for democracy requires a vibrant civil society to limit government power and to provide alternative perspectives on governmental actions.

The issue of ethical practice in operational psychology also raises the broader question as to whether society will impose limits on the institutional use of psychological knowledge and expertise to manipulate people. As psychological knowledge grows in depth and power of application, it is vital that society debate this question, with input from psychologists. However, it is too important a question to be left to the professionals alone with their demonstrable conflicts of interest.

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NOTES

- ¹ Although the report did not find evidence that APA–CIA collusion continued past 2004, the authors acknowledged the possibility that such collusion continued through channels invisible to the investigators. The primary source of evidence available to Hoffman's team of investigators largely was emails on APA servers. Thus, channels of covert influence not reflected in official APA emails were to a great degree invisible to Hoffman's investigators.
- ² Relatively trivial harm, such as pain of a pinprick or the stress often associated with a routine military exercise, may be allowed by this criterion.
- ³ The Foundation heard of the struggle around psychologist participation in national security interrogations and offered to fund a conference on the topic. We suggested that the broader topic of the ethics of operational psychology would be a more forward-looking focus, helping to set the agenda for future discussions.
- ⁴ Even if one accepted this argument, one seldom knows at the initiation of interrogation that an individual is indeed a terrorist or spy. The multitude of likely wrongly detained individuals at Guantánamo illustrates that this argument still would not justify interrogation participation.

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APPENDIX

A. | The Brookline Principles on the Ethical Practice of Operational Psychology

Produced by the *Ethics of Operational Psychology Workshop*

September 20, 2015

The emergent specialty of operational psychology—the use by psychologists of psychological skills and principles to support military and intelligence operations—has the potential to improve national security and general wellbeing. This specialty currently includes personnel selection; soldier resilience training; Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) training; behavioral consultation; outcome assessment; hostage negotiation; interrogation support; and personality profiling for high-risk, high-stakes missions. It is widely accepted that some of these applications constitute ethical practice while the ethicality of others is widely disputed.

Impassioned domestic and international controversies indicate that this field of practice is fraught with exigencies that challenge, and potentially violate, ethical principles for psychologists. The involvement of psychologists in abusive interrogation operations during recent conflicts demonstrates the need for careful examination of the ethical foundations of operational psychology practice.

Concerns about the ethics of operational psychology are further heightened because such operations are often necessarily conducted in secrecy. This can pose a significant challenge for state licensing boards, charged with providing ethics oversight, in those cases where the identities of the psychologists involved are unknown to the board or where the necessary evidentiary documents are unavailable.

For the profession of psychology to fulfill its potential, psychologists must uphold the public trust in the profession's ethical and scientific integrity across all domains. Some activities that fall within the field of operational psychology carry a high risk of undermining that trust and integrity, thereby diminishing the reputation and effectiveness of the entire profession and its service to national security.

Stephen Soldz, Jean Maria Arrigo, and Brad Olson of the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology organized a three-day workshop to engage in a deep and thoughtful dialogue about the specific ethical challenges faced by psychologists practicing in the field of operational psychology. Participants included psychologists, physicians, and social science professionals; military and intelligence professionals; and attorneys, ethicists, and human rights advocates. The discussion also drew upon years of dialogue between participants and members of the military and intelligence community. The workshop took place September 18–20, 2015, at the Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis in Brookline, Massachusetts, with support from the Meyer Foundation.

From this workshop a consensus emerged that the ethical issues confronting the field of operational psychology are particularly pressing. We therefore believe it is important to clarify relevant ethical principles and develop additional guidance for ethical practice for psychologists in this field. The current American Psychological Association Ethics Code, while providing an excellent foundation and while applicable and binding on all APA members, does not in all cases provide adequate guidance to facilitate the moral discernment necessary for such activity; it would benefit from supplementary ethical guidance in this specialty area. The following Fundamental Principles and Guidelines are intended as a preliminary framework for that supplemental guidance. Consistent with their preliminary nature, these principles and guidelines highlight problem areas rather than provide definitive solutions.

Fundamental Principles and Guidelines

1. Psychology as a profession is based upon the core ethical principles of beneficence and nonmaleficence, or “do no harm.” These principles apply to all psychologists, including those working in military or national security contexts. The ethical obligations of professional psychologists are not diminished or altered in times of national emergency or perceived crisis. Operational psychologists serve best when they consistently uphold the moral and scientific integrity of their profession in the military or intelligence context.
2. Ethical concerns are at their highest when psychological expertise is employed to *cause harm* to the targets of an intervention. The awareness, expectation, or intention of inflicting harm, with whatever justification, is in direct tension with these core ethical principles of beneficence and nonmaleficence. The greater the harm, the greater the likelihood that participation in the activity is not ethically permissible for psychologists.
3. Ethical concerns are heightened when the target of the psychological intervention is *unaware* of the intervention or the purposes or risks of the intervention. Interventions conducted without the awareness and agreement of the target are in tension with the core ethical principle of voluntary informed consent.
4. The risk of compromised professional ethics is also heightened when, because of secrecy, compartmentalization, or strategic manipulation in the mission, psychologists lack *full awareness* of the scope of an operation in which they are participating. Ethical guidance and evaluation of operational psychology must address the implications of military and intelligence operations where full awareness is not available.
5. The ethical *acceptability* of any particular action to be undertaken by operational psychologists must be evaluated independently of the purported *effectiveness* of the proposed technique or operation. The fact that a particular action is considered necessary or has been determined to have been successful with respect to the mission does not thereby make it ethical for psychologists.

6. The ethical practice of psychology in every domain requires mechanisms for ethical *monitoring and accountability* by other professional psychologists and for ethics consultation and support. To be effective these mechanisms must be independent of chain-of-command pressures and must exhibit a degree of transparency and public accountability consistent with human rights standards. The development of comprehensive oversight, accountability, and consultation mechanisms for psychologists practicing in operational contexts is thus essential.
7. Members of professions have a duty to refuse to participate in activities that violate their professional ethics, and they must have a realistic opportunity to do so. However, some operational psychologists, by virtue of their position within the military or intelligence chain of command or their critical roles in certain operations, will face enormous challenges in refusing participation in actions that are deemed lawful (under the law of armed conflict or other relevant bodies of law) but that violate their professional psychological ethics.
8. Operational psychologists who nevertheless choose to participate in activities that violate psychological ethics, in fulfillment of their military, intelligence, or other contractual commitments, should first be required to surrender their professional licenses and memberships in professional psychological organizations and must not present themselves, or be represented by others, as professional psychologists. Those who make this choice then are serving not as psychologists but as military or intelligence professionals with the corresponding ethical standards of those professions.

Endorsed by the following participants in the Ethics of Operational Psychology Workshop, Brookline, Massachusetts, September 18-20, 2015:

(Endorsement represents only the positions of individual signers and not those of employers or other organizations, which are listed for identification purposes only.)

Scott A. Allen: University of California Riverside, School of Medicine

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Yosef Brody: President, Psychologists for Social Responsibility

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Monisha Rios: Saybrook University, College of Social Sciences; Service-Disabled US Army Veteran

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